THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 4, No. 1 January, 1965

We have to admit it -- the Society "bash" was an unqualified, thundering success!! December 12th has gone down in Temperanceville history as the most memorable date since the repeal of Prohibition.

Undaunted by damp, foggy weather, forty people turned up at the Red Carpet Saloon for a very full evening of ragtime. Most guests were from the Toronto-Hamilton area, but a large and enthusiastic group came over from the States: Nick Viggiano all the way from New York City, Gale Foehner and Carl Baxter from Rochester, Don Burns and Mike Reagan from Buffalo, and Tom Shea and Walt Gower from Detroit. Dave Pope of Vallejo, California, tried his best to make it, but he had fog problems, too -- his plane was grounded in Richmond, Virginia.

The evening got under way officially at about 7:30 with Tom Shea playing BRUN CAMPBELL EXPRESS, and from then on it was everyone for himself -- both pianos were going full blast until the party broke up shortly before sunrise. Pianistically speaking, the Red Carpet Saloon had more talent per square foot than ever graced a Musician's Union hall on a rainy Thursday.

Featured player was Society recording star Tom Shea, whose live performances are even more thrilling than on record. Also ragging the uprights were Jack Cuff of Toronto who plays a delightful stride style . . . Rochester piano technician Gale Foehner whose repertoire and range are endless . . . 19-year-old Bill Chestnut of Streetsville, Ontario, with a very strong Darch-like style . . . Don Burns who plays professionally at the Carriage House in Buffalo, and whose BILL BAILEY nearly blew out the windows . . . and Society Treasurer Idamay MacInnes with a classic legato style that delighted the Joe Lamb fans.

At one point Tom Shea got up to get a drink and reappeared wearing a sousaphone. After the usual ribald comments subsided, Tom and his wind bass paced clarinetist Walt Gower and the two pianos through DOCTOR JAZZ, CLARINET MARMALADE, KING PORTER STOMP and some other fine New Orleans standards. Walt Gower, in addition to playing superb clarinet, was responsible for producing the artwork and typography for the album jacket of RSR #2 -- for which we would like to make public our warmest thanks.

During the early evening, the two pianos were separated -- the Heintzman in the Saloon and the player in a hallway just outside the Saloon door -- and each had a hard-working Ragtime Kid at the keyboard and an enthusiastic audience. Shortly after midnight someone suggested duets, so ten willing musicians trundled the player into the Saloon while four others wheeled in Don Burns and the piano stool; neither party spilled a drop and the music went on with hardly a break. One of the high points of the night occurred when host Kinnear cleared his throat and sang WHEN RAGTIME ROSIE RAGGED THE ROSARY, accompanied by Tom at the piano.

Singer Bonnie Roberts, headliner of the 5-9 p.m. show at the Ports of Call in mid-town Toronto, belted out some rousers from the Nineties, and her 15-year-old daughter

Debra performed very nicely at the piano. Jim Kinnear's two sons -- Jim, 16, and Bobby, 12 -- also soloed on a couple of Joplin rags. At times the Saloon looked more like a sound stage with cameras, floodlights and half a dozen tape recorders capturing the sights and sounds.

At the height of the activities the Saloon telephone rang and there was Dave Pope calling long distance from Virginia to say hello and listen to the music. We don't know how much you heard, Dave, but it must have sounded like a catfight!

Tacked up beside the phone was a letter from Brian Bulgin: "Greetings to all who foregather on Dec. 12 at the Ragtime Rendezvous for an evening of the righteous sound. Sorry I won't be there. On that evening I shall be going to a gay soiree of the local music society to hear a Dvorak quartet and the Mozart 5tet. In their way, they too are euphonic sounds. Have a good time, and a Happy Christmas to all the revellers."

There was general agreement that the Society's first get-together was a success in every way, and that there should be more in the future. We concur wholeheartedly, and will keep you posted on developments.

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Ragtime Society Intimate Bash
The Red Carpet Saloon
December 12, 1964

Hosts

Jim Kinnear, King, Ont.
Idamay and Allen MacInnes, Toronto, Ont.
Bev and Bob Ashforth, Toronto, Ont.

Guests

Carl Baxter, Rochester, N.Y.
Babs and Pat Black, Cooksville, Ont.
Walter Burgess, Toronto, Ont.
Donald Burns, Grand Island, N.Y.
Joan and Tom Carnegie, Don Mills, Ont.
Bill Chestnut, Streetsville, Ont.
Jean and Jack Cuff, Willowdale, Ont.
Cathy Faulkner, Richmond Hill, Ont.
Gale Foehner, Rochester, N.Y.
Cathy and John Goddard, Toronto, Ont.
Walt Gower, Royal Oak, Mich.
Mary Jukes, Toronto, Ont.
Norm Kelsey, King, Ont.
Lynn Mortson and Paul Mason, Toronto, Ont.
Lorne McEachnie, Toronto, Ont.
Mike Reagan, Buffalo, N.Y.
Joyce Ridley, Barrie, Ont.
Bonnie Roberts and Debra Roberts, Burlington, Ont.
Tom Shea, Garden City, Mich.
Bob Sillcox, King, Ont.
Glad and Larry Stevenson, Weston, Ont.
Jessie and Norm Swail, Leaside, Ont.
Faith and Bob Urwin, Willowdale, Ont.
Nick Viggiano, Blauvelt, N.Y.

Photo coverage of the party starts on the next page. Pictures are numbered so that interested parties may order 8" X 10" glossy prints - please order by number. Price: $1.00 postpaid for each 8" X 10" print.

PARTY POSTSCRIPTS

"Many thanks to you all for a lovely time the other night - we had so much fun and a taste of good Ragtime!" Tom and Joan Carnegie

"Decidedly the best party we've been to in years . . . had a wonderful time." John and Cathy Goddard

"I want to say the 'Bash' was something I can never forget." Don Burns

"The party was a smashing success! I kept hearing people saying what a great time they were having - it was terrific." Bill Chestnut

"Many thanks for a most delightful evening. Pat and I don't know when we have enjoyed a party as much." Pat and Babs Black

"Boy, what a gasser. A real ball. I have not enjoyed myself so much in years." Gale Foehner

MEMBERSHIP

If your 1965 membership renewal has been received by us, you will find your Society membership card attached to this Newsletter. This is the first time we have issued an official membership card, and we felt you might appreciate having it.

Also attached is a wallet-size promotion card outlining the purpose and functions of the Society. This is part of a concerted drive for new members, and we're counting on you to do your part. Make a New Year's resolution now (retroactive) to sign up at least one new Ragtime Society member during 1965. To make this proposition a little more interesting, here's what we're prepared to do:

> For each bona fide new member you sign up this year, we will send you - absolutely free - a genuine satin, elasticized sleeve garter. No ragtime fan or saloon proprietor should be without a pair of these snappy Gay 90's garters, so get busy now and sign up <u>two</u> new members. Your choice of bold masculine colors: Ragtime Red, Barroom Blue or Gambler's Green.
>
> For the ladies (or for the lady in your life): if you prefer, you may choose the feminine type of garter -- so convenient for concealing a flask, small pistol or roll of mad money. Comes in three attractive colors: Womanly White, Little Girl Blue, or Basic Black.
>
> <u>How to order</u>: send us the name and address of the new member together with his $3 membership fee. State your choice of garter style: male (sleeve) or female (leg), and your choice of color: see above.

Boost ragtime and your Society -- bring in a new member in '65 and join the Order of the Garter! To help you recruit new members, a supply of Society promotion cards will be sent to you on request.

INFLUENCE OF RAGTIME ON STAGE MUSIC

by Karl Kramer, Beverly Hills, California

The impact of ragtime on Tin Pan Alley has oft been both belabored and bemoaned. It is also very easy to chart. Before 1910, VARIETY's list of "million copy songs" featured such titles as RED WING, SCHOOLDAYS, I LOVE YOU TRULY, WONDER WHO'S KISSING HER NOW, MEET ME TONIGHT IN DREAMLAND and LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON. But the canny Irving Berlin, with his usual facility for anticipating and cashing in on trends, soon changed all that sweet moonlight stuff. He got his feet wet by setting lyrics to Botsford's GRIZZLY BEAR and Snyder's WILD CHERRY. Then he hit the jackpot with ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND in 1911, and for the next few years the new million-copy champions included ROBERT E. LEE, MEMPHIS BLUES, BALLIN' THE JACK, INTERNATIONAL RAG, ST. LOUIS BLUES, 12TH STREET RAG, HE'S A RAGPICKER and EVERYBODY RAG WITH ME.

First let me disarm the critical purists by admitting that none of these were rags in the classic sense. They were merely syncopated songs with a ragtime beat and an occasional phrase or two borrowed from the classic ragtime composers (Berlin's FOLLOW THE CROWD is note for note from Arthur Marshall's KINKLETS). From 1910 to World War I, every other published number was termed a rag, culminating in the grand champion - WHEN RAGTIME ROSIE RAGGED THE ROSARY. Unfortunately, the collapsing house brought good ragtime down with it. In destroying a mouse, Broadway killed a giant, and it is interesting to speculate as to what higher realms of ragtime would have evolved if it had not been in such disreputable companionship.

But there has been very little comment on the influence of ragtime on musical comedy and light opera composers of the same period. This type of production began to shed the romantic waltzes of Lehar, Jacobi and others of the European school, and wander down the seductive path of syncopation, just a short time after the popular song writers blazed the trail. The first to jump were the big extravaganzas such as the Ziegfield Follies and the Winter Garden productions. These hit shows featured dozens of syncopated songs, mistakenly labeled rags. Some of them were pretty good numbers -- AT THE BALL THAT'S ALL, THE GABY GLIDE -- but mostly they were ordinary syncopation with deft dancing and colorful settings. But here and there a better class composer became tempted with the ragtime image and a perusal of old scores brings up some real surprises. For example, Victor Herbert, Sigmund Romberg and Fritz Kreisler! Don't you believe me?

It's not surprising that Romberg was the first to jump on the bandwagon of current ragtime popularity, as Sigmund was one of the greatest "adapters" in musical history. George Jean Nathan wrote that "a Romberg opening night was the only one where you went INTO the theatre whistling the songs from the show." I have a copy of the big hit from Romberg's first Winter Garden score, WHIRL OF THE WORLD (1913). It is titled RAGTIME ARABIAN NIGHTS and the cover reads "Music by S. Romberg" -- he hadn't achieved the status of "Sigmund" at that early date. I saw the show and am not ashamed to admit that I thought it was a darn good song at the time. In fact, his first show was so successful that he got the job of writing all the Winter Garden scores for the next five years, turning out three productions a year. These included about a dozen of what were termed "ragtime songs", which they weren't, of course. The best of the lot was RAGTIME PIPES OF PAN, which was both melodious and ingenious. Then he dropped syncopating with chorus lines and found much greater success with BLOSSOM TIME, MAYTIME, DESERT SONG,

et al. Schubert's UNFINISHED SYMPHONY was easier to turn into SONG OF LOVE than were any of Joplin's rags -- and it made more money.

Victor Herbert's one and only fling with ragtime came in his score for THE ONLY GIRL (1915). He probably did it as a lark, as I can hardly believe this Irish sentimentalist would seriously contemplate writing a rag. The number was called THE MORE I SEE OF OTHERS, DEAR, THE BETTER I LIKE YOU. It is a typical Herbert soubrette song except that under the title the composer included this explanation in parentheses: "(An Imitation of the Present Day Ragtime Song)". It is to be noted that Herbert termed ragtime "present day" as late as 1915, at which time the corpse had already been interred. Herbert's "imitation" was in the arrangement only, the left hand carrying the regular beat and the right hand taking off on a syncopated counter melody.

And so we come to Fritz Kreisler, the most unlikely of the trio to have had any truck with ragtime, but the one who most nearly succeeded. But Kreisler, as a composer - not as a violinist - was amazing, versatile and considerably unappreciated. It is mostly forgotten today that he reversed the Broadway process of making a pop tune out of a classic, and perpetrated a more clever musical hoax by writing original numbers and claiming they were long lost folk tunes. The idea was ingenious and the music was good: CAPRICE VIENNOIS, LIEBESFREUND, SCHON ROSMARIN.

With still another twist of his facile wrist, Kreisler composed an operetta. This was in 1920 and his APPLE BLOSSOMS cast included Fred and Adele Astair and John Charles Thomas. Unlike the dated scores of the time, this score sounds fresher today than it did more than forty years ago. The big hit was WHO CAN TELL? - also called STARS IN YOUR EYES - which is still being played for ice ballets and ballroom waltzers. But our interest is in two utterly syncopated songs from this same show.

The first of these, THE WIDOW, is an unpretentious bit of syncopated fluff which is noteworthy more for what it suggests than for what it is. In 2/4 time with a strong ragtime beat, the simple chorus theme cries for a jazz treatment by one of those New Orleans Preservation Hall combinations, with a different instrument carrying the solo on each replay. But it is the harmony of this song which is most unusual. A professor of music could probably explain it very simply, but I know only the effect and not the means. It is a sort of "violin" harmony which Kreisler uses often in the operetta and which is probably because he played the fiddle and not the piano.

The second number is more complicated and probably could have been developed into a genuine rag by one of our Missouri masters. Titled A GIRL, A MAN, A NIGHT, A DANCE, this song is constructed in far more sophisticated syncopation than the Broadway composers ever achieved. It is, however, a real problem for the ordinary sight reader. I asked Max Morath to give it a whirl and after looking at the piano score he didn't want to take a chance without further study. It is in 2/4 time, with a strong rag beat. The first and thematic strain of the chorus employs seven notes to the first quarter, carrying one over to the next beat, which in turn has five more, so you have the unique combination of 7 to 1 and 1/6 counts, and 5 to 5/6. The result is a sort of Viennese ragtime, and brings up the provocative question as to what would have resulted if Kreisler had been born in Missouri and Joplin in Vienna.

MUSINGS FROM MAX

What is classic ragtime -- as opposed to non-classic? Is there a clearcu definition or formula which can be applied to distinguish the two . . . or is it individual opinion or instinct which says that GRACE AND BEAUTY is a classic and OPERATIC RAG isn't?

These were some questions we asked Max Morath recently, and he was kind enough to outline his thoughts for us:

"About the question -- 'what is classic ragtime' -- I think you answered it in pretty much the way I would when you said it might be 'individual opinion or instinct, etc.'

"I often think of it this way -- Joplin, Lamb, Scott and others didn't know they were writing CLASSIC ragtime -- just ragtime. We've decided it's classic. Who's 'we'? You and I and a lot of other rag-nuts whose opinions vary widely.

"Of course I think we can all agree that classic ragtime means ragtime for the piano essentially (or at least written for the piano in the first place), and that it contains three or four themes, generally of sixteen measures each, in 2/4 time. I don't think it has to be played always on the piano to be classic, though, else where do you put the fine banjoists -- Vess Ossman, Fred Van Eps, etc? That's a classic sound in any sense of the word. Or what about orchestral versions?

"I think it simply comes down to the usual use of the word 'classic' -- just the best of what was done in a particular genre. And then we can start arguing again what was best.

"By the way, I also think that much great ragtime was written and performed with the voice against instruments. I'm as much or more interested in that, and the whole spirit of rag, as I am simply in classic rag."

-Max Morath

REPRINT CLUB

More good news for Reprint Club members -- we can now guarantee you 17 rag reprints for your $10 membership fee.

One of the recent rags sent out to Reprint Club members was LEOLA TWO-STEP. This is one of Joplin's lesser-known compositions -- in fact, it wasn't even listed in the first edition of They All Played Ragtime. LEOLA was first published in 1905; it has a strong march flavor to it and nice melodic lines. The copy from which we reprinted was blown up from a 35mm negative and required considerable retouching before it was legible; even so, the quality was not quite up to our usual standards, for which we apologize. No apologies for the quality of the rag, however -- we feel it is one of Joplin's best.

MAPLE LEAF FLAG

After much bickering and debate, the Canadian government has finally chosen a new flag for this country -- a red maple leaf on a field of white, with vertical red bars at staff and fly. Although it remains to be seen who will salute when it is officially unfurled, we applaud the choice of the maple leaf motif. The next chore facing parliament is the selection of a Canadian national anthem; there is only one choice, of course, and The Ragtime Society is lobbying strongly in Ottawa for the adoption of MAPLE LEAF RAG.

PERFORTIES

We're glad to report that Karl "Butterfingers" Lear is back at the keyboard at Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Ventura, Cal. after suffering a heart attack during the summer.

Karl's musical career has included dance band work (sax and clarinet) in Seattle and Hollywood, plus spare-time composing. One number which he co-authored, LIGHTLY AND POLITELY, was recorded by Tommy Dorsey's orchestra in 1938 and later by Earl Hines. Another collaboration - SMALL BATCH O' NOD - was recorded by Freddie Slack in 1943. Karl spent 14 years with the studio orchestra at Universal International in Hollywood, contributing to the sound tracks of over 450 pictures, including "The Glenn Miller Story" and "The Benny Goodman Story."

FROM THE MAILBAG

Marge Traeger's letter (pg 78, Nov. issue) about a new mechanical piano player attachment has brought some comments from readers. Robert McWhirter of Studio City, Cal. writes: "That proves that us Southerners are more advanced than those Northerners -- that item came out down here 5 years ago and sold for $325. They lasted for about a year then disappeared. All the dealers were at war with each other trying to get rid of the machines by trying to undersell every other dealer in town. The machines did not work correctly. They did keep repairmen in business. Cases I have heard of required a weekly visit from the repairman until the person finally gave up and said the hell with it. I guess the main problem was the fingers that came down to hit the keys just didn't come down. It was the same principle as the old pianola push-up."

Reinhold Fischer of Sedalia, Mo. reports: "My cousin has had one of these player mechanisms for about a year. I think it is a Pianola. It is electrified and requires no pumping. Our hobby is to borrow or rent old player-piano rolls, play them on his regular piano with the player attachment, place the microphone in a suitable place and then put them on tape on our Wollensak tape recorders. I do not know the age of this 'gadget' but it works."

From Bert Lamb, Lancs., England: "I had an interesting job with my band last week. We were illustrating a lecture on the origins and beginnings of jazz given to a classical music society. During the lecture I was called upon to play SWIPESY CAKEWALK as an example of Classic Ragtime, and PERFECT RAG for a Jelly Roll Morton composition. I was surprised at the response from the rather staid classical music types. Feet were tapping and obviously they could recognize a form to the music which they thought hadn't existed. So I was pleased at the opportunity to spread the gospel."

Andrew Wittenborn, Scarsdale, N.Y. obviously is a satisfied buyer of RSR#2: "I have just received Tom Shea's PRAIRIE RAGTIME record and it is beyond words. I hope some day he will come down this way so I can hear him in person!"

Incidentally, Andy's letterhead and business card list a fascinating variety of hobbies and interests: Photographer; Jazz Addict (Dixie and Modern); Old Car Fancier - Mostly Graham-Paige; Antique Car and Parts collector; Member of AACA, The H. H. Franklin Club, Chrysler Products Restorers Club; Bookseller of sorts and Train Chaser when Steam is available (RMRRC member).

Send us your card, letterhead or what-have-you . . . we already have a fairly good collection, and when there are enough, we will reproduce them in a montage in the Newsletter.

PERFORMER PROFILE - CHARLIE THOMPSON by Gary Ellison

In June of 1964, another of the pioneers of Ragtime passed away. This was Charlie Thompson, who was an outstanding example of St. Louis piano artistry.

On August 21st, 1963, I spent one of the most enjoyable hours of my life. In a large room there was an old piano, Charlie Thompson, myself, and my tape recorder. From 11 a.m. until noon, this grand old man reminisced about his era when Ragtime was king and about the princes who played. Some of the things Charlie said are not in agreement with They All Played Ragtime, but it's his story and I think it should be presented. You can't hear the piano work he did that day, but here is what he said . . . a testimonial to the music and men that made up his early life:

Q: How did Ragtime get started?

Charlie: St. Louis was headquarters for Ragtime. Scott Joplin came down here all the time . . . see, lots of people thought that he was just partly natural musician and partly a student musician. And he's named as the father of Ragtime. That was because he wrote a Rag that became internationally known early. But the fact of it was, Tom Turpin of St. Louis should have been the father of Ragtime. He wrote the first Ragtime piece ever published, BOWERY BUCK. And he was Scott Joplin's tutor. But Scott Joplin was a smarter boy than Turpin. He got all he could get here, and brought all he could bring with him, and he went on to New York and started all his stuff in the East. Tom Turpin had his Rosebud Cafe in the 1890's, then later on he had two or three places, a big place called 'Jazzland' on Market Street. At that same time he had another saloon, a big saloon in the block near Jefferson Avenue. He just went on and made a career out of that business. The last piece he wrote was WHEN SAMBO WENT TO FRANCE. And, I don't know, I think he put it in the wrong hands. He put it in a small publisher. Lotsa times a small publisher can't push a song.

Q: How long have you been playing?

Charlie: All my life. I play by ear strictly. Don't read music, no -- I use a code, a numerical code. We all used it at first, Luckeyeth Roberts, James P. Johnson, everybody. James P. was one of the greatest.

Q: What kind of music did Blind Boone play?

Charlie: Any kind. Any kind from FAUST down to MEMPHIS BLUES. Anything that he could hear twice, he'd reproduce it, and if you weren't a very excellent musician, he'd beat you playing it. He played my LILY RAG. I played it over twice for him and he played it. Just laugh all the time. James P. Johnson taught Fats Waller. Lotsa people don't know that. I got the history on that. Fats Waller was an organist, and he wanted to learn Ragtime music and James took him over and taught him. He never could play with James. James and Luckeyeth Roberts -- you've heard of him -- they were in a class by themselves. James was a very particular friend of mine. He and I played around the corner from each other in Toledo, Ohio. He played about a year down there.

Just Published!

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